

Vision Quest

How the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program Strives to Produce, Promote and Provide Environmentally Friendly Products and Services to Federal Customers

By Betty Joan Smith

"Our instructions are very simple - to respect the Earth and each other, to respect life itself."¹

*The late Mathew King
Contemporary Lakota elder*

Native cultures around the world have traditionally embraced the Earth's energy recognizing that "Mother" Earth gives and sustains life to all its inhabitants. To have reverence for all of life energy...the energy of plants, animals, natural elements and forces was a lesson early learned. In many traditions, young members of the tribe were severed from their familiar surroundings, families and friends in order to embody this lesson. The youths embarked on a sacred solo journey called a *Vision Quest*.

This article is the first of a series that will appear in *Closing the Circle News*. The articles will focus on the environmental efforts of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program. JWOD is a unique Federal procurement program that is helping the Government realize its vision of a sustainable "green" future by providing Federal customers with a variety of environmentally friendly products and related services.

Going for the Green

The Federal Government has a vision...a vision of providing national security, economic prosperity and opportunity for its citizens, while at the same time protecting, conserving and reclaiming our natural resources. Most people realize that no natural resource, including our forests, lakes, and rivers, as well as, gas, oil and mineral deposits will last forever, especially while continuing the "consume and dispose" practices of the past. Landfills are overflowing and today we, as a society, are challenged to find ways to stop the continuous solid waste flow.

Executive Order 13101, Greening the Government through Waste Prevention, Recycling and Federal Acquisition is a roadmap for this journey. The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program shares this vision, and, as a mandatory source of goods and services, can provide environmentally friendly products and services to Federal customers.

¹ Mathew King, from *Noble Red Man: Lakota Wisdomkeeper Mathew King*, compiled and edited by Harvey Arden, Beyond Words Publishing, Inc., Hillsboro, OR, 1994.

The JWOD Team...working together, working for you

The JWOD Program is administered by a small independent Federal Agency, The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (Committee). The Committee oversees the provisions of the JWOD Act, a Federal law that dates back to 1938. The law requires the Government to purchase products and services provided by nonprofit agencies that employ individuals who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. Two nonprofit agencies, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH (serving people with a range of disabilities) are designated by the Committee to provide technical assistance to community based nonprofit organizations throughout the nation. Examples of nonprofit organizations associated with NIB and NISH, include Lighthouses for the Blind, and local affiliates of Goodwill Industries, and United Cerebral Palsy Association, as well as various organizations that work with individuals who have mental developmental disabilities.

NIB and NISH provide technical and marketing assistance, product development expertise, educational training, marketing and other assistance to the community-based groups. The local nonprofit organizations provide rehabilitation and job-training services, as well as employment opportunities to over 30,000 individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

JWOD – Making it “Easy to do the Right Thing”

Just take a quick inventory of your office desk. Chances are you have many products produced under the JWOD Program. But since this is a publication devoted to “environmental issues” let’s highlight the JWOD “Green” line. A nonprofit organization in the Northwest manufactures a tape dispenser that is made from 100% recycled plastic from industrial waste. Blind Industries and Services of Maryland makes letter and legal-size lined notepads out of 100% recycled paper, including the cardboard back. An ARC (formerly Association of Retarded Citizens) chapter in Jefferson County, New York makes loose-leaf binders out of 100% recycled materials. The Easter Seal Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania makes calendar pads, desk pads and pocket planners using 50% recycled materials, including 20% post-consumer material. Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind produces exquisite professional business cards on recycled paper, printed using soy-based ink. Two nonprofit agencies, Industries for the Blind in Milwaukee, WI and Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, NC make retractable pens using recycled, post-consumer plastic. The Milwaukee organization, along with Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica, NY manufacture natural woodgrain biodegradable pencils that contain no paint or lacquer. Then there are the numerous recycling and reclamation services JWOD Program participants provide to the government. The JWOD Program is committed to making it “*easy to do the right thing.*”

Government at its Best

The JWOD Program is a “win-win times two” partnership:

- The Federal Government receives high-quality, reasonably priced products and services in a

timely manner;

- Taxpayers win when individuals with disabilities become employed, pay taxes and receive reduced benefits;
- The Earth wins through increased demand and procurement of “environmentally friendly” products and recycling services;
- Individuals with disabilities win when given the opportunity to prove their abilities and join the American work experience.

The Quest Continues

As we journey along this path toward a sustainable “green” future, the JWOD Program will continue to strive to meet the needs of Federal customers. Look for more about the “Green” JWOD in future editions of Closing the Circle.

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